

This week's community profile: Hickory Corners

Hickory Corners may go nuts

By Gary Dodge

Press-Gazette

HICKORY CORNERS — Bob and Pat Broetzman want to return this community to its roots.

"I'm looking for some young hickory trees and we're going to bring the nuts back to Hickory," Bob Broetzman says.

The Oconto County community was named for a hickory forest, but today just one hickory tree stands.

It's in the yard of the Broetzmans, 9884 Oconto County M, who planted the hickory 25 years ago.

Press-Gazette photos by Sandee Gerbers

"At the time I didn't even know it was a hickory tree, until a few years later when some nuts started to fall off," says Bob Broetzman, 58.

Over the years, loggers eliminated the hickory forest around this community on Oconto County M and G in the town of Maple Valley.

Hickory Corners also once had two gas stations, a general store, blacksmith shop, insurance office, saw mill, bicycle shop and a cheese factory.

The Broetzmans' son, Dennis, owns the closed Hickory School on Highway M.

The town of Maple Valley is dry and has been since its inception, says Pat Broetzman, 57. Some residents tried to change the law to allow the sale of alcoholic beverages, but voters rejected it.

The Broetzmans' keep themselves tied to history with their antique shop — Pat's Part of the Past — inside their garage.

The shop is filled with old coffee pots, meat grinders, logging tools and antique furniture.

Bob's dad, Gus, who died at 93, operated a filling station, better known as the Hickory Law Office because his dad became involved in politics.

"Dad's garage was the old hangout," he says. Teen-agers sat inside the shop and played board games such as checkers.

"Almost every corner you come to there's a lot of history," Bob says.

Over the years, many businesses closed. Hickory Corners lost its general store to fire in 1978.

Now, besides the antique shop, other businesses are Genco Upholstering, D&B Implement and Marine, Hickory Glass Co. and the Ceramic Shop.

Residents shop in Suring, Gillett, Oconto, Oconto Falls and Green Bay. Many children attend the Suring School District.

Three churches — the Hickory United Methodist Church, Hickory Church of Christ and Our Redeemer's Lutheran Church — thrive.

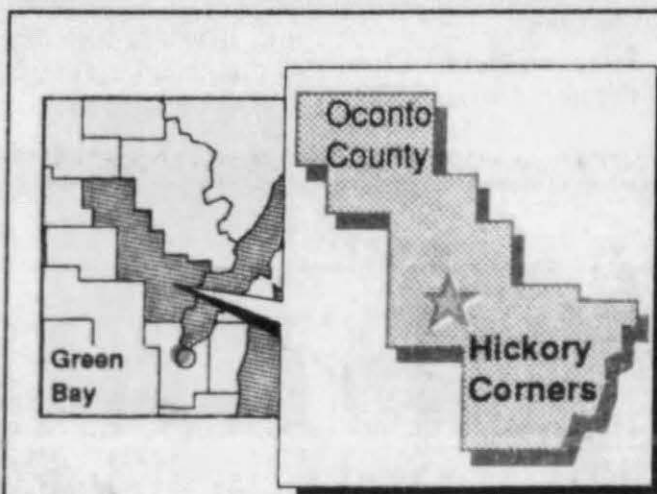
"We work hard to keep our church going," says Marie Blazek, 74, Route 2, Suring, a member of United Methodist Women. The group holds a fall bazaar.

The Rev. Bob McKinney, 67, pastor of Hickory Church of Christ, says he was struck with the closeness of residents when he moved here from La Crosse five years ago.



Flower power: Alfred Regal of Hickory Corners goes to work in

his flower garden. He plants flowers each year on the property.



Claim to fame: "Probably our most famous citizen was Mr. Smiley Burnette, a pastor's son who became a popular Hollywood cowboy star," the historical society booklet states.

Hickory Corners file

- ☐ **Population:** Estimated at 25.
- ☐ **What's the name?** You believe either a highway sign declaring the community Hickory or residents who call their home Hickory Corners.
- ☐ **Founding father:** Pat Kelly came from Ireland in 1855 to become the first white settler, according to *Hickory Corners: A History*, published by the Hickory Chapter of the Oconto County Historical Society. Kelly Lake and Kelly Brook were named for him.

Verna and Alfred Regal, 8868 County G, found their large flower garden, and wooden animal and flower figures attract many unexpected guests.

"People always stop by to look at our flowers," says Verna Regal, 74. They allow people to pick bouquets of flowers

from their large garden that Alfred, 77, plants each year.

"We have real good neighbors," she says.

Next week: Casco Junction in Kewaunee County



Table talk: Bob Broetzman visits with his wife, Pat Broetzman, at their antique store, Pat's Part of the Past in Hickory Corners.



Religious community: Ted Lartz, left, of Oconto Falls, talks with the Rev. Bob McKinney, pastor of Hickory Church of Christ in Hickory Corners.